

making the case

Our principles for a Personal Learning Space

1 PebblePad supports personal learning

A group of people can share a common experience but may learn different things from it, make sense of their learning in different ways, and want to document or evidence their learning differently. The flexibility of the PebblePad interface supports all of these individual differences and enables you to engage in personal learning in your own way.

2 PebblePad offers a safe and private place which is owned and controlled by you, the user

PebblePad is totally private. It is a fundamental principle of PebblePad that nobody else can enter your PebblePad. There is no interface for an administrator to log into your account because that would contradict the core principle of personal ownership. You can choose, at any time, to allow others to view and interact with one or more of your assets but no-one ever has access to your entire PebblePad.

3 PebblePad is multi-purpose – but purposeful

PebblePad can be used for any number of educational, professional and personal processes. It can be used by anyone who wants to record, reflect on and learn from experience. Regardless of who you are or what you are using PebblePad for, the structure and scaffolding within the system makes its use purposeful. Far from being a 'file dump', PebblePad helps you make sense of experience and create a record of that experience that you can draw upon for all sorts of reasons, for all kinds of audiences.

4 PebblePad supports learning wherever it happens, whenever it happens

Any experience offers opportunities for learning. Most institutional tools are typically designed to capture learning that takes place in formal places in structured ways. PebblePad supports the idea that learning is 'context-free': it takes place all the time, not only in the courses you study in educational settings. PebblePad helps you to identify, record, and create links between learning experiences wherever and whenever they occur.

5 PebblePad helps to scaffold and surface the process of learning

The wizards and forms in PebblePad support users through the process of creating meaningful records of experience and linking these records to develop rich understandings of learning. This scaffolding not only benefits users but also makes the process of learning evident for anyone with whom these records are shared. Supervisors, tutors and/or peers can assess not only the product of the learning activity but more importantly the process of skill and knowledge acquisition. Together with the capacity for ongoing formative feedback, PebblePad becomes a powerful tool for teaching and learning.

6 PebblePad is underpinned, and informed, by a reflective structure

At every step of the way PebblePad users are prompted to consider 'Why?', 'So what?', 'What if?' and 'What now?' This inbuilt reflective structure is what transforms PebblePad into a space where learning is generated rather than simply collected and evidenced.

7 PebblePad gets people talking and helps users construct their narratives

The reflective structure of PebblePad is conversational – it prompts further thought and exploration. Anything created in PebblePad can be shared with one or more others in both private and group spaces. The capacity for comments, feedback and collaboration facilitates dialogue between users in these spaces. This sharing and dialogue contributes to the creation of much richer, more meaningful records of learning.

8 PebblePad can accompany you throughout your life and across all your activities

Over time, your needs and interests will change but the assets you have stored in PebblePad are always there for you to revisit and to use in different ways. Because PebblePad is 'context-free' you can continue to evidence learning and experiences wherever you go and whatever you do. PebblePad has the flexibility to be of value to you in any environment and at any stage of your life. Ideally it is the place where you record, reflect on, and learn from your journey and share it with others.

eportfolio? ... eportfolio system? ... Personal Learning Space?

There is still a great deal of debate about what an 'eportfolio' actually is and this debate is unlikely to ease because eportfolios come in many shapes, sizes and colours. To add to the confusion, the term 'eportfolio' means different things to different people – a repository, a presentation, a system, a private space, a social networking space, or a combination of any of these. There are now many tools available that profess to be an 'eportfolio' and all look different, have different purposes, or target different audiences.

PebblePad is first and foremost a Personal Learning Space, but also encompasses an 'eportfolio' and an 'eportfolio System'. So what do these terms then mean. The following are the definitions that we work by:

eportfolio – as an asset

“An 'eportfolio' is a purposeful aggregation of digital items – ideas, evidence, reflections, feedback, etc – which 'presents' a selected audience with evidence of a person's learning and/or ability.”

eportfolio – as a system

An 'eportfolio System' allows users, in any of their learning identities, to selectively record any abilities, events, plans or thoughts that are personally significant; it allows these records to be linked, augmented or evidenced by other data sources and allows the user to integrate institutional data with their personal data.

It facilitates self-awareness, promotes reflection, supports enrichment through commentary and feedback from the recipients of shared assets. It grows, develops and matures as the user accesses it, without constraint, over time. It provides tools for aggregating assets in multiple forms, for telling myriad stories to diverse audiences, and ensures absolute user-control over what is shared, with whom, for what purpose and for how long.

It is a personal repository; a personal journal; a feedback and collaboration system; and a digital theatre – where the audience is by invitation only.

Personal Learning Space

A 'Personal Learning Space' does all of the above AND facilitates the process of life-long and life-wide learning. A personal learning space has inbuilt tools and functions that generate learning as distinct from simply recording and evidencing learning. Internal wizards prompt the user to consider diverse aspects of their experiences and facilitate the process of making sense of, and learning from, these experiences to a much deeper level.

It is not assumed that learners naturally have the skills widely associated with creating a 'good' eportfolio – collecting, selecting, reflecting, interpreting, synthesising, evidencing, and presenting. A personal learning space supports users in the development of these skills by scaffolding the process of creating meaningful assets. These skills are life-long and life-wide and their development is independent of formal learning environments and externally defined frameworks and criteria. This is what distinguishes a 'Personal Learning Space'.

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